

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 4, 2009

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

As Members of the California Congressional delegation with significant interests in protecting our state's sensitive coastal economy and environment from the risks of offshore drilling, we want to reiterate our unwavering opposition to oil and gas lease sales off the California coast and bring your attention to a recent, disastrous oil spill off the northwest coast of Australia. This spill occurred during operations of the West Atlas drilling rig and Montara offshore platform – some of the most advanced and modern offshore drilling equipment in the world.

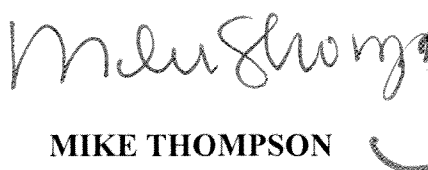
According to industry sources, the West Atlas drilling rig was built in 2007 with “impressive standards of quality,” while the Montara offshore platform was “constructed to a very high standard” in 2008.¹ Nevertheless, the spill lasted for 74 days and led to an “out of control” fire that could have resulted in the rig's sinking to the seafloor.² Even more alarming than the initial occurrence, Australian newspapers have reported that four attempts to bring this spill under control failed despite use of the two-year old, “state-of-the-art” West Triton drilling rig.³ To date, the spill has covered more than 10,000 square miles of some of the most sensitive marine ecosystems in the Indian Ocean – contaminating an area larger than the state of Massachusetts.

This spill is illustrative of the fact that even the most modern and advanced drilling technology cannot prevent, slow or stop a massive spill from occurring. Although proponents of offshore drilling often suggest that strict government regulations, adherence to industry best practices and advanced safety technologies reduce the odds of a spill to near-zero, this incident proves that serious oil spills remain an understated risk to our coastal communities and economy.

A spill of this magnitude off the California coast would devastate fish and wildlife, destroy our beaches and cause serious hardship for the coastal businesses that generate more than \$23 billion per year for our state's economy. The rough ocean off California would complicate attempts to contain a spill of this size, and the rugged and remote nature of much of the Pacific coast would make cleaning up such a spill extremely dangerous and difficult, if not impossible, for emergency responders.

It is clear that the damage caused by major oil spills still represents a serious threat – despite use of the most advanced drilling technologies. Again, we strongly urge you to remove all lease sales off California from the draft 2010-2015 OCS leasing plan.

Sincerely,



MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress



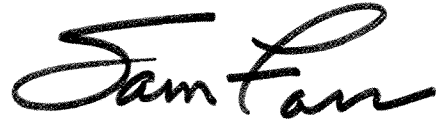
DIANNE FEINSTEIN
US Senator



BARBARA BOXER
US Senator



HOWARD L. BERMAN
Member of Congress



SAM FARR
Member of Congress



ZOE LOFGREN
Member of Congress



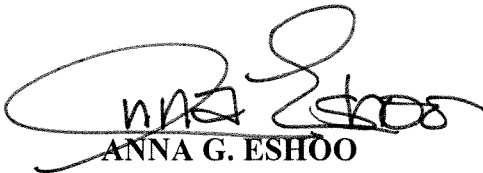
BARBARA LEE
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JACKIE SPEIER
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Member of Congress



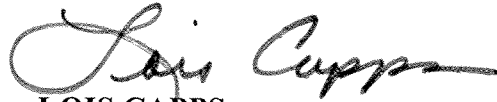
SUSAN A. DAVIS
Member of Congress



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JOHN GARAMENDI
Member of Congress



LOIS CAPPS
Member of Congress



JERRY MCNERNEY
Member of Congress

¹ Keppel FELS Delivers West Atlas Ahead of Schedule (9/17/07) http://www.rigzone.com/news/article.asp?a_id=50258; Montara Wellhead Platform Heads Off for Timor Sea Installation (8/1/08) http://www.rigzone.com/news/article.asp?a_id=64979.

² PTTEP Drops Most in Five Months, Burning Rig May Sink (11/2/09) <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601130&sid=aZ9odqIFgLdE>

³ Bid to stop PTTEP oil leak delayed by equipment failure (10/26/09) <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/business/story/0,28124,26259824-36418,00.html>; West Triton sets sail (1/16/08) <http://www.upstreamonline.com/live/article147133.cce>.